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AUTHOR Wall, Janet
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ABSTRACT

The Department of Labor, through a grant with the National Center for O*NET Development, has provided three instruments for use by career development practitioners. These include an interest inventory, a work values inventory, and an ability assessment. The tools are designed to provide results that can assist persons interested in learning about themselves and how their characteristics match up with occupations. People taking the assessments can use their results to explore occupations available via O*NET Online. This paper will describe each of the assessments and will indicate how the instruments can be used to assist people in exploring career and occupational options. (Contains 17 references.) (Author)

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*The New O*NET Assessment Tools for Career Exploration*

by
Janet Wall

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The New O*NET Assessment Tools for Career Exploration

Janet Wall

The Department of Labor, through a grant with the National Center for O*NET Development, Raleigh, NC, has provided three instruments for use by career development practitioners. These include an interest inventory, a work values inventory, and an ability assessment. The tools are designed to provide results that can assist persons interested in learning about themselves and how their characteristics match up with occupations. People taking the assessments can use their results to explore occupations available via O*NET Online (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000a). This paper will describe each of the assessments and will indicate how the instruments can be used to assist people in exploring career and occupational options.

The Interest Profiler

The Interest Profiler is a 180-item inventory that is designed to measure the constructs of the Holland Vocational Personality Theory (Holland, 1985). The client reads a variety of work activities and is asked to indicate whether he or she likes or dislikes the activity, or if he or she is unsure. The paper-based instrument is self-administered, self-scored, and information is provided to assist the people in interpreting the results on their own. The instrument was designed for use by people age 14 through adult and takes about 20-40 minutes to complete (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000b).

People taking the Interest Profiler receive their Holland RIASEC codes along with interpretative information that explains the meaning of the codes and information about O*NET occupations that reflect the characteristics of those codes (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000c). Relevant occupations are included in the score report and are organized by primary interest code. From there, people are encouraged to make use of occupational information that can be obtained via the Internet through O*NET Online by looking up occupations by title and learning about their numerous characteristics. (www.onetonline.org). Occupations can also be searched by various characteristics such as interests, skills, tasks, etc.

The Interest Profiler is also available in an automated format. Users answer the same questions as those found in the paper/pencil version, but

the computerized version scores the instrument for the client and provides a listing of the best occupational matches for the individual. As with the paper/pencil version, users are encouraged to visit O*NET Online to learn more about occupations.

The computerized instrument is available for downloading from www.onetonline.org. There is a desktop version and a version that can be networked on multiple computers. It should be noted that the instrument does not operate from the Internet, but the programs can be downloaded and installed on one's own computers.

Both the paper/pencil version and the computer versions are easy to use and have excellent reliability statistics. These statistics, along with validity information and a description of the development process, are provided in the User's Guide and other publications (Lewis, P. & Rivkin, D., 1999).

The Work Importance Locator and Work Importance Profiler

The Work Importance Locator and the Work Importance Profiler are based on Dawis and Lofquist's Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984).

The Work Importance Locator uses a card-sort format. Directions ask the client to read 20 needs statements and assign relative importance to them by determining whether each needs statement is of the highest importance to the lowest importance by placing the card in one of five categories. Each of the five categories can contain only four of the needs statements. Through a somewhat complex self-scoring procedure, the assessment-taker determines his or her highest work values from the six used in the instrument: Achievement, Independence, Recognition, Relationships, Support, or Working Conditions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000d). As with the Interest Profiler, the score report directs the client to occupations that match the highest work value. The occupations are listed in the score report that accompanies the Work Importance Locator (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000e).

The Work Importance Locator is also available in computerized format. Because the delivery and scoring format are substantially different from the paper/pencil version, the computerized version is renamed the Work Importance Profiler. As with the Interest Profiler, the instrument can be downloaded and installed on a stand-alone computer or can be networked.

In the case of the Work Importance Profiler, the program has 21 screens on which the assessment-taker reads five needs statements and rank-orders each statement in comparison to the others. Following the rank order phase, the assessment-taker rates each needs statement as to its

importance in his or her ideal job. The input is scored by the program and the dominant work values are provided to the client along with a listing of the occupations that best match the results. This is done automatically and quickly.

The instrument is recommended for use by people age 16 and older.

The Ability Profiler

The third assessment developed and released by the Department of Labor is the Ability Profiler (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002a). This assessment is provided only in paper/pencil format and is not downloadable from the Internet except in files suitable for printing. The Ability Profiler has seven paper/pencil subtests as part of the battery: Arithmetic Reasoning, Vocabulary, Three-Dimensional Space, Computation, Name Comparison, Object Matching, and Mark-Making, with the last one being a psychomotor assessment. Four non-paper/pencil psychomotor assessments—Place, Turn, Assemble and Disassemble—require specialized equipment (U.S. Department of labor, 2002d).

The Ability Profiler is a standardized assessment, meaning that its administration is formal and timed. For purposes of fairness, deviations from the administration procedures are not permitted except for people who require accommodations for their disabilities. A manual for administering the Ability Profiler, complete with specific directions, sample items, practice tests, and timing requirements is available (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002b).

The Ability Profiler is very similar to the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB), but has improved formats, new items, and clearer administration procedures.

A unique and helpful feature of the Ability Profiler is a tailored score report, generated by an automated scoring program, which provides each test taker a person-specific score report showing how he or she performed in comparison to other test takers. The report also compares the individual's assessment profile to profiles of compatible occupations. Scoring can be done at the site where the test is taken, and results can be returned to the test taker via a printed report or it can be sent via e-mail to the client. A counselor can help interpret the test information if necessary.

The Ability Profiler can be used by people age 16 and older who can read English at the 6th grade level or higher, and who have not taken the Ability Profiler within the last six months.

Due to the particular requirements for administering the Ability Profiler, training materials are available (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002c).

Use of the Assessment Information

In the case of all three instruments, it is important to understand that the results should not be used for job placement or placement into job training programs, but only for career counseling and career exploration. Results from all three assessments can be used by a counselor to help focus an individual toward examining, in more detail, occupations which seem to satisfy a person's interests, work values, and abilities. The Department of Labor considers these instruments to be what they call the basis for "whole-person" assessment.

Clients who use the instruments are encouraged to identify a job zone. A job zone is a category from one to five, which describes the amount of education and training generally required by an occupation. For example, occupations categorized as a job zone of one require little or no previous experience or knowledge, require only a high school diploma or GED certificate, and need only a few days to a few months of training. On the other hand, occupations classified as job zone five require extensive skill, knowledge, and experience of as much as five years. Generally, a minimum of a bachelor's degree is required, but many occupations require advanced degrees. Some on-the-job training may be required; but, for the most part, it is presumed that the individual already has the required skills for performing the job. The other three categories require varying amounts of education, training, and experience..

By selecting a current and future job zone, a person can determine what occupations match his or her current education and training status and what occupations might be attainable and suitable if additional education and training is obtained.

Using the information from their assessments, along with their decisions about appropriate job zones, individuals can begin to hone in on suitable occupations.

O*NET Occupations

The prime career development product produced by the U. S. Department of Labor is the O*NET database of occupations. The Department has been methodical about collecting current information about occupations and occupational requirements, and making the information available to users. The information is organized according to the O*NET content model shown in Figure 1.

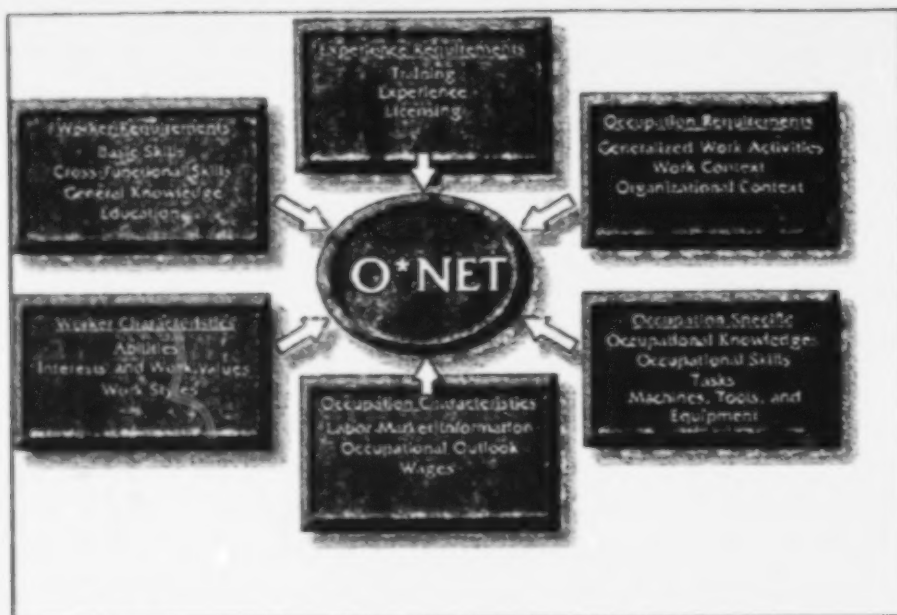


Figure 1 – O*NET Content Model

Occupational information can be found at www.onetonline.org. An example of the information can be found in Figure 2.

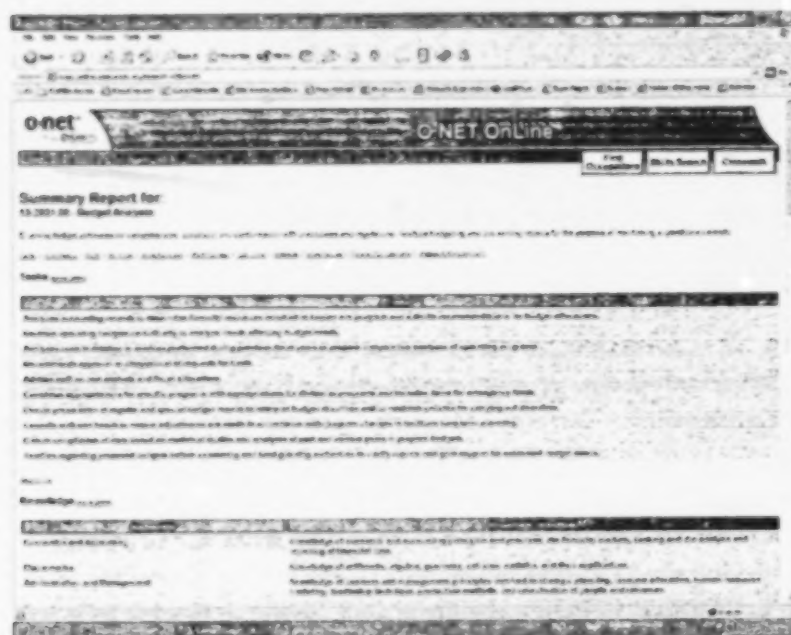


Figure 2 – Example Occupational Summary (partial)

Further Information

The Department of Labor has provided extensive information and access to its instruments via the Website www.onetcenter.org. Perhaps the best summary of the O*NET assessment tools can be found by Lewis and Rivkin in Wall and Walz, 2004.

Individuals who wish to receive training are directed to www.onetacademy.com, produced by Maher & Maher, where real time and archived training programs have been made available to interested parties without cost. In addition, various guides, reports, and training materials are available for downloading from www.onetcenter.org. Copies of the actual instruments and many related manuals and reports can be downloaded for use. There are sections on the Web site that address frequently asked questions.

For users of any assessment instruments, it is important that the test administrator or counselor follow appropriate and ethical standards. Guidelines for appropriate test use can be found from several sources including those developed by professional associations such as the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association and the National Council on Measurement in Education (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999), the Joint Committee on Testing Practices (JCTP, 2002) and the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education (AACE, 2003).

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